

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**  
**Department of Education and Skills**

**Whole School Evaluation**  
**Management, Leadership and Learning**  
**REPORT**

**ABACAS Kilbarrack,**  
**Greendale Road, Dublin 5.**  
**Roll number: 20375I**

**Date of inspection: 5 June 2014**



## Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning Report

### Introduction

A Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in ABACAS Kilbarrack in June 2014. This report is based on a selection of lessons observed in a range of learning settings in the school, interaction with pupils and review of their work, meetings with the principal and with board and parent representatives, completed parent questionnaires, and a selection of school documents. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

ABACAS Kilbarrack is a special school operating under the patronage of Autism Ireland. The school has an administrative principal, a director, six teachers and thirty-one special needs assistants. The current enrolment consists of thirty-six children who have autism and complex special needs. The school was granted provisional recognition in April 2011 and is currently applying for permanent recognition.

The school has **strengths** in the following areas:

- The overall quality of teaching in the school is very good and there is good evidence of positive outcomes for pupils.
- Management and staff work together constructively to provide a caring, learning environment for all pupils.
- Good quality individual education and behaviour plans are prepared collaboratively to address pupil needs.
- A committed and active board of management competently oversees the management and development of the school.
- There is a strong commitment by all stakeholders to the continued development of the school.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- The school is recommended to continue to develop the curriculum by considering the introduction of the new Junior Cycle Level 2 Learning Programmes and extending pupil experiences of the Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE) and Arts Education curriculums.
- Teachers are advised to consider increasing the use of group-based activities.
- The board should explore ways of establishing better communications with parents and to support the re-establishment of the parents' association.
- The board should continue to develop a range of policies to guide the organisation of the school, and add a development section to the school plan.

## Findings

### 1. The learning achievements of pupils

- Pupil progress is regularly assessed and recorded. School records provide good evidence of the learning achievements of pupils through the successful attainment of individual education plan (IEP) targets and the progress recorded by a range of appropriate assessment instruments. This evidence shows positive learning outcomes for pupils across the school. Assessment data is carefully analysed and used to plan teaching and learning. Co-occurring special needs are considered in planning, teaching and assessment.
- All pupils have access to a broad curriculum which is informed by the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999) with reference to the *Guidelines for Teachers of Students with General Learning Disabilities* (NCCA, 2007). Many pupils also engage productively with the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) programme. The school is advised to consider the benefits of introducing the new Junior Cycle Level 2 Learning Programmes to guide the development of key areas of learning for senior pupils.
- The school's core curriculum consists of learning-to-learn skills, language and communication, Mathematics, Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), information and communication technology (ICT) and Physical Education. A wider curriculum which includes the primary curriculum areas of Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE) and Arts Education is delivered through cross-curricular activities. There is scope for the further development of these areas of the curriculum in some classrooms.
- Teachers systematically use a range of direct approaches and incidental teaching strategies to develop and maintain reading and writing skills. Some pupils follow age-appropriate reading schemes while a few pupils engage with personalised reading material. In Mathematics, pupils engage in a range of activities across the strands of the curriculum and apply learned skills through activities designed to promote independence such as visiting local shops.

### 2. Quality of teaching

- The overall quality of teaching in the school is very good. Teaching is differentiated to meet the identified individual learning needs of each pupil. Learning activities are well planned, with a clear and predictable structure.
- A range of appropriate classroom strategies and evidence-based, autism-specific methodologies are employed. There is an agreed, school-wide planning process. Good quality IEPs are prepared collaboratively and inform the comprehensive long and short term planning of teachers.
- A significant proportion of the instruction is through one-to-one discrete trial teaching (DTT). Staff successfully use DTT to help pupils develop a range of essential skills. To extend the range of pedagogical approaches, teachers are advised to consider increasing the use of group-based activities such as a daily circle time to foster the development of pupils' communicative, social and imaginative skills through curriculum-based activities.
- There is a strong focus on language and communication and SPHE in direct and incidental teaching, in and out of the classroom. As part of the school's self-evaluation plan this year, the school has engaged in the whole-school promotion of Lámh. The school is commended in its advancement of Lámh as a means to enable non-verbal and verbal pupils to communicate more effectively.

### 3. Support for pupils' well-being

- The director is a highly competent professional and plays a significant role in behaviour management within the school. The good quality behaviour plans are evidence-based and clearly outline the behaviour to be targeted. The director provides support to school staff and to parents in dealing with challenging behaviour.
- Staff are experienced and well trained in behaviour and classroom management, and they demonstrate a clear understanding of pupil needs. Classrooms are attractive and well organised. Visual schedules, clear rules and set routines, choice, clear and careful transitions were all used effectively to support pupils. The school has a sensory room and respite areas for children to de-stress as required.
- Many pupils have access to speech-language and occupational therapy but access can vary depending on each individual pupil's provider. Staff work competently to support the delivery of therapy programmes. A range of resources and technologies are skilfully employed to support pupil communication.
- The school's co-location with Scoil Eoin has facilitated the progressive development of an integration programme. Currently, nine pupils participate in the programme integrating with mainstream pupils for positive social or academic experiences. The school supports the transitioning to mainstream education whenever possible.
- Relationships with parents are positive and the principal and staff are accessible to support and advise parents. The school communicates formally with parents through a comprehensive handbook for parents, termly newsletters and a school website. A daily home-school diary is utilised by teachers to communicate with parents but only a minority of parents use the diary regularly. The school is advised to investigate this and to explore ways of establishing better communications with parents.
- Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* without modification. To be fully compliant with the requirements of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*, the principal should report on whether or not there are any new or ongoing child protection cases at every board of management meeting. This should be recorded in the minutes of each meeting.

### 4. Leadership and Management

- The board of management is an appropriately constituted body that exhibits a deep sense of loyalty to the school. The committed and active board has a diversity of educational knowledge and expertise to competently oversee the management and development of the school. Board meetings are held regularly and agreed reports are prepared and shared with staff and parents.
- The board has efficiently led the development of a range of quality policies to guide the efficient operation of the school. However, a number of documents including policies on attendance and participation, communication with parents, internet usage and staff deployment have yet to be developed. In addition, a number of policies are still in draft form and need to be finalised. All policies should carry the date they were ratified by the board as well as the date they are due for review. The board should review the expulsion section of the Code of Behaviour and create a policy statement regarding the practice of placing pupils on reduced timetables.
- The whole-school plan is well advanced and due for consultation with staff and parents. A development section based on school priorities that have been identified collaboratively with the whole-school community should be added.

- The board should participate in training in the role and functions of boards of management provided by organisations such as the National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education (NABMSE) and the Catholic Primary School Management Association (CPSMA).
- The principal demonstrates leadership skills and has capably managed constructive change in the school. He is proactively engaged in a variety of management duties and maintains a positive, visible presence around the school. The deputy principal, the director and a special duties teacher work collaboratively with the principal as an effectual in-school management team. Their work is characterised by high levels of respect and communication that enable the day-to-day management of the school to occur in an efficient and effective manner.
- Parents' representatives are actively involved on the board of management. The parents' association has contributed significantly to the school previously, but is not currently active. The board should endeavour to re-establish the parents' association and to facilitate its active involvement in school life.

#### **5. School Self-evaluation**

- There is a strong commitment by all stakeholders to the continued development of the school. Staff are firmly supportive of management and are capable of and open to change. There is evidence of some good practices including ongoing professional reflection, self-reviews and the use of surveys which demonstrate the school's capacity to engage in school self-evaluation. The school has engaged successfully with the school self-evaluation process.

#### **Conclusion**

- The school's capacity to engage in continued school improvement is high.